
Shelter from the storm: The land struggles of bonded labor in India

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Key Words

Problem Tree, Social Analysis CLIP, Activity Mapping, Causal Dynamics, Forum, India, International Development, Participatory Action Research, Rural Development, Aboriginal People, Bonded Labor, Agriculture, Social Exclusion, Housing, Land, Conflict Management, Urban Growth

Context

- The Katkari are Adavasi (tribal) people who live near Mumbai, India.
- Men, women, and children work as bonded labour at brick-making kilns in the region.
- People live in ramshackle huts on rocky hills on the margins of non-tribal villages.
- Rising land prices due to an economic boom in Mumbai are prompting landowners to sell and forcibly evict the residents. Thousands of villagers in more than 200 hamlets face eviction.
- State and federal laws promise title for rural housing land for families from tribal communities but the Katkari are unable to exercise these rights.



Questions

- Why are the Katkari unable to exercise their rights?
- What conditions need to be in place to create and sustain pressure on government officials?

Participants

- Katkari men and women (95 men and 45 women) in 10 different hamlets
- Members of 50 other Katkari hamlets
- Government officials, landowners, and village authorities



Tools

- Problem Tree
- Social Analysis CLIP
- Activity Mapping
- Causal Dynamics

Example Results

Problem Tree: Why is the hamlet insecure?

First-order causes: Legal title is currently held by non-tribal landowners; government officials do not act; the Katkari do not apply consistent pressure on officials.

Underlying causes: Fear of reprisal, competing interests, power imbalances, gaps in knowledge.

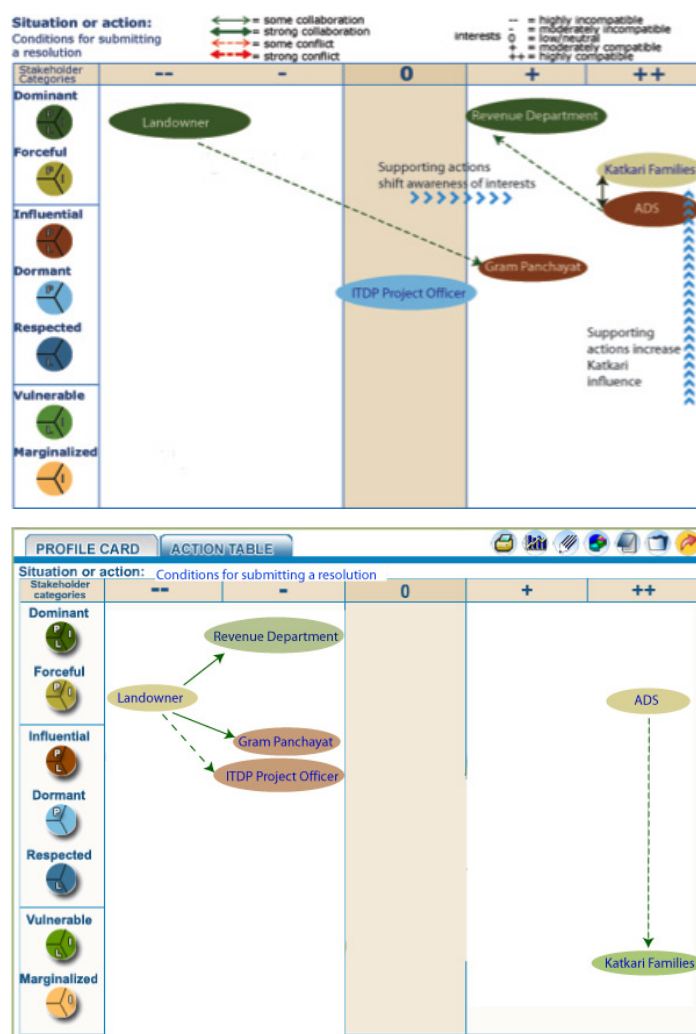
Effects of the problem: There is no school in the hamlet. Children are leaving school early or not going to school at all. Instead, children enter into bonded labor with their families on brick kilns. This perpetuates their bondage and limits their awareness of legal rights and rules that could help them.



Social Analysis CLIP: Are the conditions right for submitting a resolution to village authorities?

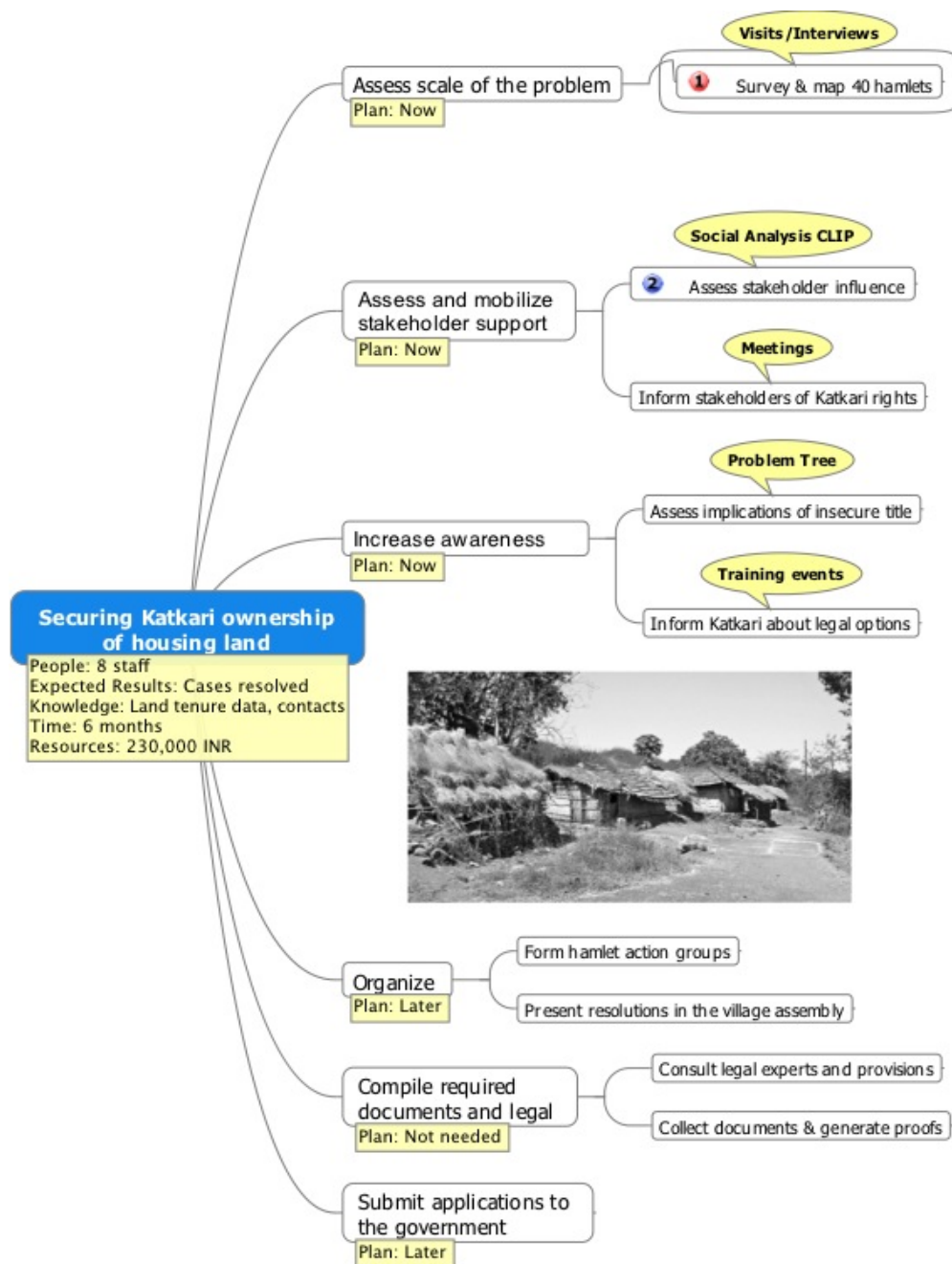
Analysis of stakeholder relationships showed conditions were not ripe for action (Figure 1). The interests of the Katkari oppose those of more powerful stakeholders and they do not have effective allies. Plans were made to improve the situation (see Activity Mapping).

When the analysis was repeated three months later, it showed positive changes in conditions, as a result of actions taken. Participants said that the power of Katkari families to influence the situation had increased because they now had the information and means to communicate their claim forcefully. The claim was backed up by a better organized and united community, as well as expressions of support from other stakeholders. Dependence on landowners for employment remains an underlying concern. This is confirmed by a Causal Dynamics assessment of reasons why some communities proceeded with the resolution while others did not.



Activity Mapping

Throughout the process, participants identified follow-up activities and new research topics. These were consolidated into visual plans that helped to guide and monitor next steps.



Outcomes

- Katkari see the links between insecure hamlets and important obstacles in their lives.
- Entire hamlets have asserted the right to housing land. This was not the case in the past when people were reluctant (and afraid) to press for their rights.
- Confidence of the Katkari in the potential of collective and individual action enhanced.
- Government officials and some landowners recognize the legitimacy of Katkari claims.
- Structural constraints on the ability of Katkari to exercise their rights identified and potential strategies developed.

Contributions of SAS²

- People see various aspects of a problem and weigh the pros and cons of proposed actions.
- The flexibility of each tool allows for careful adjustments to language (use of visual cues and local terms and concepts).
- SAS² results complement and provide direction to information gathered through other means (mapping, archival searches, and survey data).